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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BAMAKO 000387

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT TOURE READY TO TARGET AQIM, WITH HELP

REF: BAMAKO 00186

Classified By: Ambassador Gillian Milovanovic, Embassy Bamako, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1.(C) Summary: Ambassador Milovanovic met with President Toure for one hour on June 10 to relay concerns expressed on the margins of the recent TSCTP conference about Mali's engagement vis-a-vis AQIM. The Ambassador noted that AQIM's continued use of northern Mali as a safe haven, and the recent execution of British hostage Edwin Dyer, are rapidly tarnishing Mali's image and sapping political capital Mali has accumulated since its 1991-1992 transition to democracy. The Ambassador encouraged President Toure to take steps to show that Mali was indeed serious about eradicating AQIM from Malian soil. In response President Toure observed that the recent lull in hostilities with Tuareg rebels enabled Mali to focus entirely on AQIM and proclaimed that Mali was prepared to go after AQIM militarily provided partner nations provided required military equipment and assistance refurbishing several northern military outposts. He also invited U.S. military planners to work directly with Malian military counterparts on plans to remove AQIM. A deep sense of frustration and disappointment with neighboring nations, and Algeria in particular, colored nearly all of the President's remarks during the meeting. He repeatedly blamed Algeria, Niger, and Mauritania for failing to follow through with his proposed Head of State summit and for abdicating their responsibility for policing the Sahel to an under-manned, under-equipped and under-trained Malian military. Toure said that he now understood that the only person he could count on to address AQIM was himself. We believe we can count on Toure, but that he needs substantial help to actually move on AQIM. End Summary.

AQIM Destroying Mali's Model Image

2.(C) The Ambassador gave President Toure a brief summary of her recent consultations in Washington as part of the June 1-3 TSCTP conference and also shared concerns stemming from AQIM's execution of British hostage Edwin Dyer. Underscoring our shock at Dyer's murder, the Ambassador said the execution represented a very serious step in the wrong direction. Acknowledging President Toure's oft-stated argument that AQIM is a regional problem which demands a regional - as opposed to a Malian - solution, and noting that we were exploring ways that Washington could encourage others in the region to cooperate (which ATT welcomed warmly), the Ambassador noted that AQIM was nevertheless on Malian soil and therefore a very distinct Malian problem that is now undermining Mali's

hard-won and valuable image as a model West African democracy. The Ambassador expressed concern that all of the political capital Mali has accumulated over nearly two decades of democratic success could be overshadowed by a handful of terrorists using northern Mali as a safe haven. To protect its image, guard against the locally corrupting influence of AQIM, and quell troubling doubt about Mali's interest in combating AQIM, Mali needs to show clearly that it is serious about eliminating AQIM.

President Toure: AQIM Is Top Priority

3.(C) President Toure, somewhat agitated about this apparently growing mistaken picture of Mali, assured the Ambassador that AQIM is a top priority. He described Mali's willingness to confront AQIM as "manifest" and Mali's engagement as "total." At another point the President declared that Mali is "honestly" and "fully engaged in the fight against terrorism." He agreed that AQIM's presence had "stained" Mali's reputation, however unjustly, given the co-responsibility and greater capacity of Mali's neighbors. He remarked that Tuareg unrest had diverted Malian attention away from AQIM for several years. "We are no longer distracted by Tuaregs," said the President, "but we can't do this on our own." In another

BAMAKO 00000387 002 OF 004

part of the conversation ATT remarked "AQIM are not choir boys." President Toure repeatedly argued that Mali is unable to secure vast expanses of isolated desert on its own and must therefore rely on the support of neighboring nations. He urged what he described as "synergy" between Mali, Algeria, Mauritania, and Niger to close down AQIM supply routes and roll up AQIM bases in Algeria.

Unhelpful Neighbors

4.(C) Toure professed profound disappointment with Algeria and others' eagerness to hold Mali alone responsible for AQIM's continued existence. "Everyone is fleeing their responsibilities," said Toure of his neighboring Heads of State. This disappointment bordered on anger when Toure argued that AQIM is composed nearly entirely of Algerians and is therefore an Algerian export to northern Mali. "You need to tell Washington," he said, "that AQIM comes from abroad. Mali is not their home." He denied that AQIM received any significant support from local Malian populations - beyond the odd goat or peanuts sold to the salafists for profit by northern villagers. He maintained that AQIM survived off assistance garnered outside Malian borders, saying "we know where they get fuel and other things across the Algerian border." Toure said Mali had given the Algerian military permission to pursue AQIM as much as 1,000 KM into Malian territory but that Algeria inexplicably chose to do nothing. Similarly, the offer to create joint border patrols with Algeria has not been taken up by Algiers. "We can't talk to them," said Toure of the Algerians. "We solve our problems in little newspapers," he commented, referring to attacks on him by Algerian press, to which he responded in the Malian

media. At
another point President Toure observed that the Maghreb
doesn't listen to
Mali.

15. (C) ATT did give Algeria credit for being willing to work
with Mali on
development in the north, pursuant to the Algiers Accords.
"This is the
only thing we are able to talk with them about now," he
remarked, saying
that it is a priority for him to move to provide some
economic perspectives
to northern youth, without which they will be attracted to
smuggling at a
minimum, that being one of the few economic pursuits
available.

6.(C) Responding to the charge that Mali is perceived in
some quarters as not doing enough to counter AQIM,
President Toure relayed snippets of his recent conversation
with British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who apparently
pressed Toure to acknowledge that the British hostage was
killed on Malian soil. President Toure said he urged Prime
Minister Brown not to wait for the next hostage crisis and
stated
that Mali was ready to engage AQIM - if only Mali were not so
completely overwhelmed militarily and financially.
Referring to the March 2009 capture of individuals
suspected of participating in the kidnappings of the
European tourists along the Mali-Niger border (Ref. A) and
Mali's April 26 arrest of four AQIM members north of
Tessalit, President Toure said Mali planned to prosecute
these suspects. He also denied once again that Mali
paid or received any ransom money for hostages - whether
Austrian or Canadian - and blamed family members of the
Austrian hostages for bypassing official channels to
involve the Libyans in direct negotiations with AQIM.

U.S. Cooperation

7.(C) Emphasizing several times that he feels he has the
troops to carry
out the job (apparently "unites specials" which he said would
be composed in

BAMAKO 00000387 003 OF 004

part of the former rebels re-integrated into the army ; men
who know the
desert well), the President requested a team of U.S. military
planners to travel to Mali to help review and refine Mali's
plan to
engage AQIM and to confirm what training and equipment and
support would be
needed to implement it. He said he had the basic plan. Mali
would like to
assign two regiments to a refurbished military base in
Tessalit - provided
donors provide the required renovations funds - and two other
smaller
military outposts strategically placed in the desert to allow
troops to have
a small permanent base from which to patrol. He also
recommended basing one
Algerian unit in Tessalit and said he had proposed this to
Algiers so far to
no avail. Also essential is the provision of sufficient
functioning
transport and equipment to get the people where they need to
go and get the
job done. He called this a Malian solution to AQIM, which he
contrasted with
an apparent French offer to help Malians strategize about

security in the Sahel. ATT said the Malians accepted the French offer on condition that discussions were about the Malian plan, not one the French might try to impose. ATT remarked "I don't take orders from others."

8.(C) Toure said the execution of Edwin Dyer had convinced him of the need for Mali to establish some permanent and regular presence in the north to impose security. To achieve this, and achieve it quickly ? something he saw as essential given the negative developments with AQIM, Mali needed partner nations to furnish donate the required military hardware including logistics. If we had the equipment, said the President, Mali would move on AQIM "tomorrow morning."

9.(C) President Toure expressed some frustration that, despite conversations with Ambassador McCulley, Ambassador Milovanovic, and several with General Ward, his standard request for practical support including equipment remained both unchanged and unfulfilled. He stressed that the situation requires rapid action and requested this message be clearly stated in this report. ATT also asked the U.S. to help encourage neighboring nations, and Algeria in particular, to ratchet up their own efforts to curb AQIM activities and play better with their neighbors by attending a regional summit on Sahel-Saharan security. The summit would be short, but would commit neighbors to work together on shared problems and provide a basis for working out the modalities of cooperating, notably to squeeze AQIM suppliers and constrain the terrorists' ease of movement across borders. He stressed that this was something Mali could not do alone. The Ambassador noted that the Washington discussions included the decision to enlist partners to encourage regional neighbors to participate in a summit, something that ATT warmly welcomed.

Comment: An Isolated President

10.(C) Throughout the meeting, President Toure returned to several core themes: Mali is ready to move on AQIM if only partner nations provide the means; AQIM is an Algerian export to northern Mali and it is unrealistic to expect Mali alone to be held responsible for an Algerian terrorist group; and the region has effectively hung Mali out to dry by denying any responsibility for addressing AQIM. President Toure also appeared to be grappling with a growing

BAMAKO 00000387 004 OF 004

sense of isolation as AQIM's activities in Mali increase while regional support for Malian counter terrorism efforts continues to subside. At the very end of the meeting President Toure said: "I don't count on Algeria. I don't count on the region. All I can count on is myself." We believe that we can also count on President Toure's good faith efforts to counter AQIM, despite Mali's well-known military and financial limits. ATT is ready to do something about

this. It is essential, however, that the US (and others) move forthrightly and swiftly to take up ATT on his request for military planners and his request (if validated by the planners) for what he needs to allow his forces to act. Rapidly boosting Mali's military capacity would well serve both our interests and, if successful, speed AQIM's exit from northern Mali.

MILOVANOVIC